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### Why mindfulness sustains performance

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1 Commentary

2 **Why Mindfulness Sustains Performance: The**  
3 **Role of Personal and Job Resources**

Q1 4 Brigitte Kroon, Charlotte Menting, and Marianne van Woerkom  
5 *Tilburg University*

6 Building on the focal article by Hyland, Lee, and Mills (2015), we propose  
7 conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) as a framework that  
8 may explain why mindfulness contributes to work motivation and perfor-  
9 mance in an organizational context. We argue that mindfulness is especially  
10 beneficial in dynamic work contexts because it provides employees with a  
11 personal resource that makes them more resilient to the loss of job resources  
12 and more aware of alternative job resources in their changed work environ-  
13 ment.

14 **Mindfulness, Motivation, and Performance**

15 Job performance is a multidimensional construct consisting of in-role and  
16 extra-role performance. In-role performance concerns the proficiency with  
17 which employees perform the formal tasks of their job roles. Extra-role  
18 performance refers to the nonformalized aspects of a job that facilitate  
19 how employees adapt to changing contexts and proactively initiate changes.  
20 Adaptive and proactive performances are forms of extra-role performance  
21 that are particularly important in changing work contexts (Griffin, Neal, &  
22 Parker, 2007). To date, theory linking mindfulness to performance has fo-  
23 cused on awareness processes that seem mainly beneficial to task-related  
24 performance. Being attentive to stimuli in and outside the task reduces the  
25 chance of errors, which will improve performance (Dane, 2011). Also, mind-  
26 fulness facilitates the implementation of intentions into actions, enabling

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the achievement of work-related goals (Chatzisarantis & Hagger, 2007). Although a broad awareness of the environment may also account for the relationship between mindfulness and extra-role performance, we believe that additional theory is needed to substantiate this relationship. Because extra-role performance is not formally rewarded, it is more than task performance related to intrinsic, self-generated motivation. Below, we argue that mindfulness can be seen as a personal resource that contributes to the intrinsic motivation to perform both in-role and extra-role performance. A theory that supports this line of reasoning is COR theory.

### **Mindfulness as a Personal Resource**

The availability of resources at work is crucial for the achievement of work goals, for coping with demands, and for personal development and learning (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Job resources refer to all physical, psychological, social, and organizational aspects of the job (Demerouti et al., 2001) that facilitate the achievement of work goals and stimulate personal growth, learning, and development. However, employees are also able to build resources within themselves, such as optimism, self-efficacy, and confidence (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007). These personal resources have in common that they refer to aspects of the self that are connected to resiliency and individuals' potential to adapt to their environment (Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis, & Jackson, 2003). In a similar vein, mindfulness can be considered as a personal resource. A key element of mindfulness is acceptance of the present, which makes employees more resilient to a changing work environment by helping them accept their current level of resources and raise their awareness of alternative resources.

According to COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) people are motivated to obtain and protect their resources because resources have an instrumental value for achieving work and personal goals. Resources enhance motivation by enabling the attainment of work goals (goal setting theory; Locke & Latham, 1990). Also, resources allow people to derive motivation from satisfying their basic psychological needs for relatedness, autonomy, and competence (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Moreover, resources have a symbolic value because people define their social status and self-identity based on the resources they have. A loss of job resources may reduce peoples' confidence and self-identity, making them vulnerable for depressed feelings and loss of personal resources (Hobfoll et al., 2003).

According to COR theory, people strive to actively maintain their level of resources because a loss of resources may bring about feelings of stress and burnout. However, because change is inherent to modern organizations, alterations in the availability of resources to employees are inevitable. Changes in job resources may take place in the organization (e.g., income, career

opportunities, job security), in interpersonal and social relations (e.g., leader and coworker support), and in the design and organization of work (e.g., role clarity, autonomy). Instead of passively undergoing resource loss caused by organizational change, employees will actively try to maintain their resources by crafting their job tasks, their relations, and the meaning they attach to their work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Personal resources can be expected to play a role in how effective people are in crafting their job resources.

Past research has concentrated on personal resources like confidence and personal initiative. These resources are indisputably relevant to grasping and using resource opportunities provided in the work context. Mindfulness, however, offers an additional resource over and above these established personal resources. Because mindfulness involves an open awareness toward experiences in the present rather than the past or the future, mindful employees may become aware of resources they might not have noticed otherwise. Moreover, because mindful individuals are able to observe their experiences without judging, reflecting, evaluating, or analyzing those, they become less vulnerable to the negative feelings associated with resource loss. So, the nonjudgmental, open awareness of present moment reality and experiences associated with mindfulness enhances the awareness of job resources (physical and social work environment) and personal resources (thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations).

Being aware of the richness of resources in the work environment and being nonjudgmental about changes in resources may help people to build on to their overall level of resources. Mindful employees will be more aware of alternative resources, and because of their objective approach to their perceptions, they will be open to the full potential of each resource they encounter. Loss of job resources may therefore have less impact on their motivation. So, mindfulness as a personal resource may help employees to accept their current level of resources, to be less dependent on available resources in their environment, and to perceive more alternative resources. For example, when an employee is transferred to another department because of a reorganization, she may experience the loss of supportive colleagues in her former department. However, by being mindful, she will be better able to accept her loss and more receptive to the presence of supportive colleagues in her new department. Mindfulness therefore provides a personal resource in dealing with changes in job resources. Research has shown that job and personal resources are reciprocally related. In line with Hobfoll's idea of resources caravans, people who are more aware of job resources develop more personal resources, which contribute to the obtainment of better job resources and so on (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009). In the example, when the employee is able to approach her new colleagues with an



open mind, these colleagues will be more likely to provide social support, which is an important job resource. Also, the example illustrates the importance of mindfulness for extra-role performance. By acting mindful, the employee was open to the opportunities in her changed environment, which contributed to her adaptive performance. Also, she managed to build new relationships, which contributed to her proactive performance. Finally, her awareness of alternative job resources contributed to her overall motivation.

To sum up, mindfulness is a valuable personal resource that may support adaptive and proactive performances as forms of extra-role performance that are particularly important in changing work contexts. Not only will it help employees in coping with resource losses and in reducing associated feelings of stress, but mindfulness also helps in becoming aware of new opportunities for gaining job resources.

#### Practical Implications and Discussion

In this commentary, we expanded on the theoretical linkage between mindfulness and performance by highlighting the ability of mindful employees to expand personal and job resources that, according to COR theory, have a powerful motivational potential. Training in mindfulness may therefore be helpful not only in reducing stress but also in motivating employees. Through the effects that mindfulness has on the nonjudgmental awareness of the amount and quality of job resources, people will feel more competent, valued, and motivated in their jobs. In particular when employees need to cope with organizational change, mindfulness may help them in developing higher levels of adaptive and proactive extra-role performance. Mindfulness training in organizations may therefore be offered not only as a tool for dealing with stress (as in the mindfulness-based stress reduction training) but also as a tool for enhancing employees' levels of work motivation and performance. Our plea for mindfulness training to advance employee performance does not imply that managers are no longer responsible for investing in job resources and monitoring job demands. It does, however, imply that mindfulness training may be a positive addition that can help employees in developing more personal resources based on the job resources that are already offered by managers, human resource practices, and job design.

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